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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000001

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [KIRF](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER TO STRESS DEMOCRACY, NEED TO
CRACK DOWN ON LTTE FINANCING IN VISIT TO WASHINGTON

REF: 2005 COLOMBO 2179

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera plans to brief Secretary Rice on Sri Lanka's efforts to maintain its long democratic tradition as it grapples with a bloody, brutal terrorist challenge and to ask for a strong effort to ensure the LTTE is not raising funds in the U.S. He described President Rajapakse's late December visit to India as a success although the Indians had made clear they did not desire a "visible" role in the peace process. The FM confirmed that Norwegian peace envoy Solheim is expected in Colombo on January 23 and he welcomed a mid-January visit by U/S Burns. End Summary

Indians Decline "Visible" Peace Process Role

12. (C) The Ambassador and DCM (notetaker) called on Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera at his residence December 31 to discuss his upcoming visit to Washington and the status of the peace process. Asked about President Rajapakse's just-concluded official visit to India, Samaraweera said "it went off well." The President had seemed to hit it off with Indian PM Singh and the two had had a long one-on-one session (about which the FM did not appear to have been briefed). Samaraweera said the long official statement had included good Indian language calling on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to respond positively to the government's offer of talks to strengthen the cease-fire agreement (CFA). Asked what had transpired during the visit about India's role in the Sri Lankan peace process, Samaraweera said the President had made clear that a "more active" Indian role would be welcome but the Indians had made equally clear that, in their view, they could be most useful if their role was not too visible. Samaraweera surmised that this position is driven to some extent by internal Indian parliamentary politics in that the government depends on support in Parliament from Tamil political parties and thus must couch its Sri Lanka policy accordingly. He commented that it was clear to him that most Tamils in Tamil Nadu did not have a knowledgeable understanding of events in Sri Lanka since they are not covered accurately in the biased local language press in Tamil Nadu. Samaraweera mused that the GSL needed to mount a public diplomacy campaign in Tamil Nadu to get across an accurate picture of the government's efforts on the peace process. He said he might visit Tamil Nadu at some point after he gets back from Washington. Samaraweera said, to his knowledge, there had been no discussion of the long-proposed Defense Agreement during Rajapakse's visit to India.

Better Acceptance of Norwegians in the South

13. (C) The Foreign Minister confirmed press reports that Norwegian peace envoy Eric Solheim is expected back in Sri Lanka on January 23. It is possible that Samaraweera will meet up with Solheim (perhaps in Dubai) on his way back from the U.S. but that is not confirmed. Samaraweera complained mildly that the Norwegians "use publicity too much" when backroom delicacy might be more appropriate but agreed with the Ambassador that Solheim's statement earlier in the week had been helpful. Samaraweera also conceded that Solheim has been blamed for "failures in the peace process which is not fair" but said that much of that has stemmed from what is in the South perceived as the weakness of the "Norwegian" Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. Having a non-Norwegian SLMM head would help in that regard.

Need to Hold On To Progress in the South

14. (C) Samaraweera asserted that Rajapakse's government has moved the peace process in the Sinhalese South further than any previous government. The radical JVP's acceptance of CFA talks outside of Sri Lanka is evidence of this. Now the task, the FM continued, is to hold that progress in the face of mounting and bloody provocation by the LTTE. He said the LTTE and the GSL are still stuck on the venue for CFA talks with the Tigers insisting on Oslo and the GSL on Asia, probably Japan. Samaraweera conceded that the venue

issue could be seen as "trivial" at a time when violence is mounting but said that, if the GSL is seen as conceding on the venue issue to the Tigers, the domestic political consequences could be significant. The FM agreed with the Ambassador on the need for careful use of nation-building terminology. "Unitary" is seen by the LTTE as codeword for a centralized Sinhalese majority state with no concessions for Tamils, even when packaged as "unitary state with maximum devolution" as Rajapakse had phrased it during his India visit. "United," on the other hand, is widely understood to mean one country but with political space for all. Samaraweera said that in some ways the most baggage-free term is "undivided." He commented that during the India visit, an Indian federalism expert had given an illuminating briefing on India's federal system.

15. (C) Samaraweera told the Ambassador that all is not negative with regard to the LTTE. During an (unpublicized) December 30 visit to Kilinochchi, Tiran Alles, the head of the new reconstruction authority (RADA), had held encouraging discussions with both the LTTE and with local government officials on the reconstruction of schools and housing, both for war and tsunami displaced. Samaraweera commented, "If the LTTE were hell-bent on war, they wouldn't be talking reconstruction."

Relations with Washington

16. (C) Turning to his Washington schedule, Samaraweera said that he planned to build on the themes former Foreign Minister Kadirgamar had raised with Secretary Rice six months ago. In particular, he plans to underline Sri Lanka's impressive, unbroken democratic record since independence and point out the challenge of dealing with a bloody, ruthless terrorist group through a democratic process. Many countries are struggling to become democracies, Samaraweera continued, whereas Sri Lanka is trying to keep its democracy in the face of a brutal terrorist threat. The Ambassador commented that the issue was one with wide implications for other terrorist situations around the world. Samaraweera said he also planned to brief the Secretary on Sri Lanka's efforts to crack down on LTTE fundraising around the world and urge that everything possible be done to prevent it in the U.S. The FM took the Ambassador's point that religious freedom issues could well come up, especially on Capitol Hill, and said he would be glad to discuss Sri Lanka's record. He noted that anti-conversion legislation "will not pass." The Ambassador advised Samaraweera that U/S Burns might visit Sri Lanka in mid-January. The FM said he expected to be in Colombo in that timeframe and looked forward to meeting the U/S.

Comment

17. (C) Though a neophyte to diplomacy, the Minister seemed well-focused on the Washington visit and ready to engage substantively. We expect the main request he will make will be for greater emphasis on hindering Tiger fundraising in the US--we endorse that request. At a time when the Tigers are showing increasing belligerency, hitting their overseas moneyline might be one of the few effective ways to influence them. End Comment
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